DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 265 668 EA 018 211

TITLE	Attendance, Homework, Promotion and Retention: A Manual on Policy Development and Administrative Procedures.
INSTITUTION	Connecticut State Dept. of Education, Hartford.
PUB DATE	84
NOTE	43p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrative Policy; Administrator Guides; Age Grade Placement; *Attendance; Discipline Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Grade Repetition; *Homework; *Policy Formation; School Attendance Legislation; *State Legislation; *Student Promotion
IDENTIFIERS	Connecticut; Connecticut State Department of Education

ABSTRACT

This manual was written to assist local school districts in fulfilling the 1984 legislative mandate of the Connecticut General Assembly that requires schools to develop, adopt, and implement written policies concerning homework, attendance, and promotion/retention. The first section offers a brief discussion of the process of policy development, characteristics of good policy, and the relationship between policy and administrative procedures. The next three sections focus on attendance, homework, and promotion and retention policies. Each section offers a short discussion of the topic, a listing of key elements that should be considered for inclusion in board policy or administrative procedures, and illustrative examples of how these elements have been treated by some Connecticut districts. An appendix lists members of the statewide committee that was formed to review policies on attendance, homework, and promotion/retention. (TE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED265668

Attendance

Homework

Promotion and Retention

A manual on policy development
and administrative procedures

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization orginating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. M. Tirozzi

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EA 015 211

State of Connecticut Department of Education—1984

State of Connecticut

William A. O'Neill, Governor

Board of Education

June K. Goodman, Chairwoman
James J. Szerejko, Vice-Chairman
A. Walter Esdaile
Warren J. Foley
Roberto Fuentes
Abraham Glassman
Rita L. Hendel
John F. Mannix
Julia S. Rankin

Norma Foreman Glasgow (ex officio)
Commissioner of Higher Education

Gerald N. Tirozzi
Commissioner of Education

Frank A. Altieri
Deputy Commissioner
Finance and Operations

Lorraine M. Aronson
Deputy Commissioner
Program and Support Services

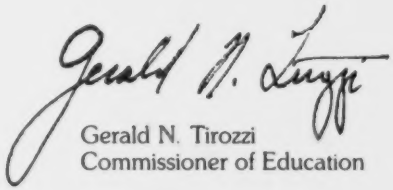
Contents

Foreword	v
Preface	vii
Policy Development and Procedures	1
Attendance Policy	7
Homework Policy	17
Promotion and Retention Policies	23
Appendix: Committee Members	33
Bibliography	35

Foreword

Research has clearly demonstrated that written school policies focusing on homework, attendance, promotion and retention create a positive school environment which fosters academic excellence. Clearly written and fully implemented policies can make the difference between a more productive and less productive learning environment.

To assist local school districts with the implementation of Public Act 84-275, which requires districts to adopt such policies by July 1985, I am pleased to share with you this manual on policy development and administrative procedures, entitled *Attendance, Homework, Promotion* and *Retention*. I believe that this manual will assist local school district personnel in the writing or updating of existing policies which will contribute to school improvement.



Gerald N. Tirozzi
Commissioner of Education

Preface

On November 17, 1983, Commissioner of Education Gerald N. Tirozzi presented *Connecticut's Challenge: An Agenda for Educational Equity and Excellence* to the State Board of Education. This document offered a series of proposals aimed at improving the quality of education in the state.

One of the proposals in *Connecticut's Challenge* generated P.A. 84-275, An Act Concerning Policies To Support Learning. The act, passed in the 1984 session of the Connecticut General Assembly, stipulated that "each local and regional board of education shall develop, adopt, and implement written policies concerning homework, attendance, promotion and retention." The law also directed the State Department of Education to "... make available model policies and guidelines" to local and regional boards. This manual is intended to fulfill that legislative mandate.

The process for developing this manual began in July 1984, with Commissioner Tirozzi requesting all Connecticut school districts to share copies of existing policies and/or administrative procedures on attendance, homework, and promotion and retention with the State Department of Education. Ninety-six districts responded. Districts were also asked to volunteer staff (administrators or teachers) or board members to serve on a panel which would meet to review existing policies and make recommendations for this manual.

The committee, which met on August 28, 1984, mirrored the diversity of the state's school districts—rural, suburban and urban, small and large. The group divided into small working groups, each assigned to review policies and procedures in one of the three areas under consideration. The groups did not evaluate the policies per se, but rather sought to isolate key policy elements for each area and to identify good examples of board policies and administrative procedures in these areas.

This manual reflects the work of the committee listed in the Appendix to whom special thanks are extended. The first section offers a brief discussion of the process of policy development, characteristics of good policy and the relationship between policy and administrative procedures. The following three sections focus on attendance, homework, and promotion and retention policies. Each section offers a short discussion of the topic, a listing of key elements which should be considered for inclusion in board policy or administrative procedures, and examples of how these elements have been treated by some Connecticut districts. It should be emphasized that the examples are simply illustrative. Each district must formulate, or review, its own policies and procedures based on its unique characteristics, its own constraints and its own strengths.

Although An Act Concerning Policies To Support Learning does not explicitly direct local boards or the State Department of Education to take any action concerning administrative procedures, this manual will discuss both policy and procedure and give examples of both. The reason for this is that the legislation does call for policy implementation and many local boards prefer, as experts in public and educational administration advise, to formulate policy in broad terms and leave specific implementation plans to the superintendent of schools.

Setting local educational policy is both a prerogative and a responsibility of local and regional boards of education. The National School Board Association defines policy as:

> . . . statements which set forth the purposes and prescribe, in general terms, the organization and programs of a school system. They create a framework within which the superintendent and his [/her] staff can discharge their duties with positive directions. They tell what is wanted. They may also indicate why and how much.

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) offers the definition, "expressed board of education philosophy," in *The Handbook for Connecticut Boards of Education*.

While state laws, such as P.A. 84--275, An Act Concerning Policies to Support Learning, mandate boards of education to develop policies governing specific areas of educational activity, effective boards already understand the importance of setting policy for these areas and for others as well.

Why Written Policy is Important

As a practical matter, written policies save the board of education and school system staff valuable time and effort. With a policy in place, it is not necessary to decide, on a case-by-case basis, what action to take in recurring situations. Because schools are in session each weekday during the school year while boards usually meet only once a month, policies are the primary means by which the board discharges its responsibility for oversight of public education. Written educational policies foster stability and continuity within a school district. Prudent policies are also a safeguard against capricious or arbitrary actions, whether real or perceived. In this way, policies protect boards, administrators and staff as well as students and their parents.

Policies are also important because they are a formal—and indeed a legal—expression of a district's philosophy and aspirations for the education of students. Good policies usually reflect community expectations though in

some cases they may serve to raise community expectations, and strengthen the commitment to a strong and vital school system. In this way, policies are a means of ensuring accountability; they are goals against which progress can be measured.

Although sometimes developed in response to a specific, immediate problem or situation, policies offer a long-term solution and the best ones are not developed in a crisis environment. Developing effective policy takes time and follows a well-conceived process.

Because it is a guide to action, a policy is worthless, and may in fact be detrimental, unless it is implemented. A bad policy—one which cannot be or is not implemented—can result in loss of board credibility and legal problems, as well as wasted time and money.

To help ensure that policies developed in response to P.A. 84–275 are workable, the process of policy development, participation of interested parties and the characteristics of sound policy are discussed here.

BYLAWS: Colchester School System

Formulation of Policies

The board of education shall reserve to itself the function of providing guides for the discretionary action of those to whom it delegates authority. Those guides for discretionary action shall constitute the policies governing the operation of the school system. They shall be recorded in writing.

A policy is a guide for discretionary action. Policy is a way for the board of education to give the superintendent of schools the sense of direction needed to make administrative decisions.

In specific situations where board of education policy does not exist, the board of education will take action after it receives a report and recommendations from the superintendent of schools.

The formulation and adoption of these written policies shall constitute the basic method by which the board of education shall exercise its leadership in the operation of the school system. The study and evaluation of reports concerning the execution of its written policies shall constitute the basic method by which the board of education shall exercise its control over the operation of the school system.

The Process of Policy Development

The initiative for a new policy, or revision of an existing one, may come from one of several sources. Board members, state legislative mandates, district administrators or parent groups may highlight the need by identifying issues or problems. The board of education should, in its bylaws, have established procedures for policy development. Many boards charge a board committee, or subcommittee, with responsibility for policy development.

Once an issue or problem is identified and the board agrees to consider a new or revised policy, the board alone, or sometimes the board with others it identifies to share in the responsibility, or those to whom it delegates responsibility might undertake a process such as the following:

Gathering facts: identifying the key points which should be considered for inclusion in the policy; determining what, if any, current

---

Adoption of Policies

The procedure for the adoption of policies shall be as follows:

1. The board of education may make suggestions and requests for development of policy to the policy committee. The superintendent of schools may suggest or recommend a policy to the committee or the board of education for referral to the policy committee.
2. The policy committee will develop a statement of policy in the areas needing it.
3. The policy committee will present the policy to a board of education meeting with recommendations. No action will be taken at the presentation meeting.
4. The board of education will take action on the proposed policy at the next regularly scheduled meeting. If the board of education rejects the policy, revisions may be proposed by the policy committee at the next regularly scheduled meeting. If accepted by a majority vote, the policy will go into effect immediately.

Amendment of Policies

Amendments to the policies must be proposed in writing at a board meeting and referred to the next regular meeting of the board. A majority vote of the *whole* board in favor of the amendment shall be necessary for adoption of the amendment.

district policies, state or federal laws or regulations, or negotiated contract agreements impact on the issue; finding out about policies in other districts; determining opinions of staff, experts in the field, students, parents and the public; identifying any costs involved.

Examining the facts: reviewing the factual information gathered; weighing the advantages and disadvantages of various options.

Drafting policy: assigning one person to draft a policy statement based on group recommendations.

Reviewing draft policy: discussing the policy draft; review by legal counsel if needed; amending or revising as necessary.

Board action: formally accepting or rejecting the recommended policy.

Completing each of these, or similar, steps provides the board of education with the greatest likelihood for developing successful policy, especially when the process also allows for participation.

Participation

The process of policy development is strengthened, and implementation is facilitated, when those affected by it and those responsible for implementing it play a role in development. The broadest participation possible is an ideal that may not be practical, or necessary in all policy development. At a minimum, the board should involve the superintendent (who should, in turn, involve appropriate staff members) since he/she will be charged with carrying out policy directives. For some policies, those for routine business operations for example, limiting participation to the superintendent and other staff may be sufficient. However, the substance of other policies, such as those which are the focus of this manual, are probably best developed with broader participation including teaching staff, parents and students when appropriate. Some boards may wish to add representatives of other groups such as elected officials, other local government agencies and the general public.

Some districts have made their commitment to participation in policy development formal, incorporating the concept in bylaws.

Characteristics of Good Policy

Process and participation should yield constructive policies which:

- are written in clear, precise language with a minimum of educational jargon;

BYLAWS: Brookfield Public Schools

While reserving unto itself the responsibility and authority to determine district policies, the board is earnest in its desire to seek out the judgment and counsel of citizens, students, and staff members in the development of policies before final adoption.

1. Student and Community Involvement

Any student or student organization within the district may submit proposals for new policies or changes in existing policies. All such policy proposals shall be given serious consideration. Students may also voice opinions on proposed policies submitted by others. Proposals for new policies or for changes in existing policies may also be initiated in writing by any citizen of the district. All such policy proposals shall be given due and serious consideration. Citizens shall be given the opportunity, through hearings and other appropriate means, to comment on proposed policies which affect them.

2. Staff Involvement

Staff members or employee organizations may initiate policy proposals. Such proposals shall be considered and acted upon by the board. If, however, negotiation of a policy consideration is requested in accordance with a negotiated agreement, the policy item shall not be finally acted upon until such negotiations have been completed and the resulting recommendations presented to the board. This provision does not limit the board's prerogative of approving the proposed policy for use on a tentative basis prior to the completion of negotiations. . . .

- explain the philosophical basis for the policy;
- are not too detailed;
- do not conflict with existing policies (unless the conflicting policy will be changed), with state or federal laws or regulations or with negotiated contracts;
- identify the parties responsible for carrying out the policy;
- identify plans for dissemination, for monitoring implementation, and for measuring effectiveness.

It should also be noted that policies will be presumed to apply to all students with only such exceptions as may be noted specifically. Thus, for example, any policy will apply to special education students except as otherwise provided in the policy or as may be specifically noted in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Administrative Procedures

One of the characteristics of good policy listed above, "not too detailed," means that board policy should, in most cases, be broad enough to allow the superintendent and his/her staff to determine the best way to implement it. Although boards of education legitimately differ in the degree of detail they regularly include in board policy, it is generally agreed that once the board has provided direction through policy, it is the superintendent's responsibility to determine how best to implement it. According to CABE's handbook, "administrative regulations declare how the board's expectations specifically should be carried out." Putting this definition into practice obviously necessitates an interpretation of "specifically." What is specific to one board may be considered general by another. Then too, the same board may wish to provide quite specific policy direction in some areas, less in others.

In a 1981 CABE/Connecticut Association of School Administrators (CASA) conference workshop on policy and administrative procedure, David Cattanach, now superintendent in Waterford, commented on the difficulty of determining an appropriate balance between the two.

> There is no greater problem you will face in developing new policies, or revising old ones, than that of balancing the need to allow your superintendent of schools reasonable discretion and professional freedom in doing what you want done against your natural desire to specify exactly how you want it done. . . . While I believe most policies should allow some freedom to the superintendent of schools, the degree of maneuvering room can, sometimes should, and often must be restricted.

Cases where maneuvering "must be restricted" include legislative mandates which decree a certain level of specificity, and times when the board has strong consensus, usually supported by administrators and the community, for ensuring that something specific will happen. At other times, it is advisable to leave policy general—but not fuzzy or without strong, clear commitment—and leave details to the superintendent.

Whenever possible, while the board is considering policy, the superintendent should follow a concomitant, parallel process to develop administrative procedures. In some cases topics treated in policy by some districts are covered in administrative procedures by others. As noted, neither approach is definitively right or wrong, though when in doubt it is advisable to err on the side of general, rather than specific, board policy.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is the *sine qua non* of education. Unless students are in their classes, the best curriculum is worthless, the most skilled teaching wasted.

Individual students who regularly miss school or classes can suffer long-term negative consequences; they are unlikely to learn the skills needed to succeed in school and in life. Students who are not in school cause more work for teachers and administrators, robbing them of time that might be devoted to more constructive activities. Truancy sometimes leads to other types of deviant behavior which causes problems for the individual and for society as well. The chronically truant student is, for example, more likely to become chronically unemployed or incarcerated.

Review of attendance policies and procedures currently in force in Connecticut schools indicate that one or more of the following elements, or topics, are included:

- the educational value of, and legal requirement for, attendance
- excused and unexcused absences
- the need for cooperation between parents and schools and home-school communication
- penalties for unexcused absences or excessive excused absences
- appeals of disciplinary action

Virtually every policy expresses the substance of the first element; the incorporation of others varies from district to district. Each of these elements is discussed briefly and examples of their treatment in existing policies or procedures are provided.

Educational Value and Legal Requirement

Writing an attendance policy affords the board of education an opportunity to stress the critical importance of school attendance and participation in classroom activities as well as the fact that state law requires school attendance. Pertinent laws are found in Connecticut *General Statutes* Chapter 168, especially section 10–184.

POLICY: New Britain Public Schools

Connecticut Statutes require that "each parent or other person having control of a child seven years of age and under sixteen years of age shall cause such child to attend a public day school regularly during the hours and terms the public school in the district wherein such child resides is in session . . . children over fourteen years of age shall not be subject to the requirements of this section while lawfully employed at labor at home or elsewhere; but this . . . shall not permit such children to be irregular in attendance at school . . . nor exempt any child enrolled . . . from any rule concerning attendance enacted by the board of education having control of the school."

Regular attendance is essential for an effective school experience and necessary for annual promotion. The responsibility for regular attendance rests with the parents or guardian or adult student. The school will

POLICY: Branford High School

The regular attendance of students at school is, by law, the responsibility of each student's parent/guardian. Time lost from class is essentially unretrievable in terms of opportunity for human exchange and experience within the classroom which ultimately results in learning. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the student and his parents or guardian to maintain a good attendance record.

The administration and staff at Branford High School believe that attendance is essential to the overall physical mental and moral development of the Branford High School student. Learning experiences that develop in the classroom are considered meaningful and essential to the learning process. Students have an obligation to give as well as to receive in the context of the classroom setting. Parents, student and faculty must work together to see that full advantage of education opportunities is realized in developing our youth into responsible, reliable and dependable young men and women.

make every effort to keep the appropriate person informed in this most critical area and assist whenever possible.

Students in the Consolidated School District of New Britain are encouraged to attend school on a regular basis. It is the intent and purpose of this Board to develop and foster the maximum potential in each and every student.

It is our conviction that successful performance in school is closely related to regular attendance. When a student is absent, he/she misses the important interaction that transpires in the classroom.

Out of concern for each student's success, the New Britain Board of Education established and maintains a standardized procedure which is aimed at prevention and/or evaluation of absences for unexcused reasons.

Excused and Unexcused Absences

Virtually all attendance policies or administrative procedures recognize that students may occasionally miss school for entirely legitimate reasons. These reasons, when documented by parent or guardian, are usually considered "excused absences." To insure that students will not be unduly penalized for unavoidable absences, some districts direct staff to provide students with excused absences the opportunity to make up missed work and tests.

POLICY: Tolland Public Schools

Excused absence—only those reasons listed below are considered legal reasons for absence from school.

A. personal illness
B. appointments with health professionals that cannot be made outside of the regular school hours
C. observances of recognized religious holidays when the observance is required during the regular school day
D. emergency family situations

When a student is absent for reasons which meet the legal requirements, appropriate provisions will be made by school staff regarding assisting the students to make up missed assignments, homework and tests.

POLICY: Branford High School

The following absences from school are considered to be excused:

1. Medical/illness
2. Death in the family
3. Religious observances
4. School sponsored field trips and activities
5. Court appearances
6. Certain athletic tournaments and meets
7. Suspension
8. In-school appointments (counselor, social worker, nurse, etc.)
9. Legal early dismissals
10. Excused tardiness to school

Although these examples cover most absences, they are not all-inclusive.

Absences that occur for no legitimate reason are considered "unexcused." The typical unexcused absence is truancy—parents are unaware that the student is not in school. In some cases, however, the school may not recognize the reason as legitimate even though parents condone it (family vacations, for example). Some policies or procedures also make clear that assistance to students with unexcused absences is not required, though it may be provided at the discretion of teachers.

POLICY: Tolland Public Schools

Unexcused absence—an unexcused absence occurs when a student is absent from school for reasons such as family vacation.

When a student is absent for an unexcused reason, the amount and kind of assistance provided to the student is at the discretion of the student's teacher(s).

Home-School Communications

Many attendance policies or procedures emphasize the need for cooperation between parents or guardians and the school to successfully enforce

attendance policy. Home-school communications are the key to this cooperation. Parents are expected to inform school personnel when students are absent for legitimate reasons. When a student is absent without an excuse, school personnel are required to notify, and in some cases to meet with, parents. Some schools also require parent conferences for cases involving excessive excused absences.

PROCEDURES: Weston High School

It is the *PARENT'S* responsibility to:

1. notify the attendance office when there is an excused absence;
2. schedule appointments after school hours;
3. limit vacations to the scheduled school vacations;
4. stress the importance of regular school attendance with their children.

It is the *TEACHER'S* responsibility to:

1. keep accurate attendance records;
2. provide a schedule of assignments and make-up work when appropriate;
3. follow through on unexcused absences and scheduled deadlines.

POLICY: New Haven Public Schools

Parents have the responsibility to make certain their youngsters attend school each day except in the case of illness or other unavoidable circumstances. If a student is to be absent from school, parents and/or the youngster have the responsibility to bring a written excuse to school, call the school, or notify the school within forty-eight (48) hours after the absence. In case of long-term illness, parents must notify the school immediately in order that a special program of instruction can be developed. Conversely, every reasonable attempt is made by the school staff to investigate all absences and develop a process for make-up work.

Penalties

Most schools detail specific penalties for unexcused absence or for excessive excused absence. A policy or procedure which allows teacher discretion in deciding whether or not to allow students with unexcused absences the opportunity to make up missed work and tests is one form of penalty. Many districts go further by designating punitive actions (e.g., detention) for unexcused absences. When a student reaches a specified number of unexcused absences, or even excessive excused absences, making it impossible to adequately evaluate academic performance in the classroom, many districts withhold credit and/or lower grades. It should be noted that the right of a school board to establish such penalties based on attendance has been upheld in court (*Campbell v. Board of Education New Milford* 193 Conn. 93, 1984). However, any evaluation of grades or loss of course credit must be related to academic performance and not be done punitively.

A summary from an article by Jeffrey C. Pingpank, Esq., concerning the *Campbell* case provides critical points for districts considering lowering academic grades when excessive absence occurs:

> The Supreme Court did not advocate such an approach, but rather indicated that such an approach, if done correctly, is legal. . . .
>
> If a board does decide to draft a policy there are several issues to consider and factors to bear in mind. First, the board should identify the purpose of the policy, and outline in broad, general terms, the desired outcomes of the policy. As the court indicated that its acceptance of the policy was based in part on its educational purpose, any language tending to connote punitive purposes should be eliminated. A short preamble to the policy, together with supporting statements reflected either in the minutes or as attached documentation to the policy's presentation should be sufficient. These supporting statements and documents help provide a paper record should the policy be attacked in court.
>
> A preamble to the policy could state:
>
> "The Board of Education, pursuant to state statutes and in an effort to provide all students with continuity of instructional experience, requires all students to attend school on scheduled days. Absenteeism is detrimental to the learning experience."
>
> A secondary preliminary question is what grades should the policy cover. Most of the debate to date has focused on the high school level, as grade reductions make the most sense at that level. How is this idea transposed to lower grade levels? Must it be transposed to lower grade levels?

The idea of loss of credit at the elementary grade level presents entirely different questions than at the high school level. If one denies a second grader credit for excessive absenteeism, is the child still promoted to third grade, or does the child repeat the second grade? Promotion makes the policy meaningless, yet retention, if the child has mastered second grade skills, makes little educational sense.

Some districts have applied their policy through all grade levels, as they have found that the threat of action, coupled with parent conferences, have produced the desired increase in attendance. The application of a well-thought-out waiver provision has also proved helpful.

Other districts may choose not to apply the policy through all grade levels, or apply different approaches to different grades. Assuming a properly drafted plan, there should be nothing illegal about such an approach as a high school student cannot claim that he or she was 'discriminated against' because he or she was treated differently than an elementary student. Rational differences can support different treatment. A board should, however, apply the same policy across the same grades throughout its system.

POLICY: Branford High School

Unexcused Absence from Class (while student is in attendance at school)

1st Offense:
The student shall serve a teacher detention.

2nd Offense:
The student is referred to an administrator and serves two (2) office detentions.

3rd Offense:
CREDIT FOR THE COURSE IN QUESTION SHALL BE WITHHELD AT THIS POINT. A conference with student, parent/guardian, administrator and guidance counselor will be held the next day or as soon as possible thereafter to discuss the action taken.

POLICY: New Milford Public Schools

Twenty Absence Limit

No student may receive course credit for a full-year course after having been absent from that course more than twenty (20) class periods during the school year. These numbers will be pro-rated for other than full-year courses and for courses meeting other than five (5) periods per week.

All absences from class will be calculated in accumulating the maximum except those absences incurred while a student is participating in school-sponsored activities and/or essential administrative business.

Waiver of Policy

A student who has accumulated more absences from a class than allowed by the policy, but feels that the situation warrants special consideration, may appeal to the administration for a waiver which would extend the number of allowable absences by a specific number for that particular student. At the discretion of the administration the parent may be requested to appear at the hearing to verify the legitimacy of the appeal.

Waivers are to be applied in a systematic manner. The administrator will consider all approved absences and any extenuating circumstances and will attempt to render an impartial judgment.

Grade Reduction for Unapproved Absences

The student will be warned by the teacher upon his/her first unapproved absence from a class, and the absence will count toward the maximum number of absences allowed for the year. For each subsequent unapproved absence from that class, the student's grade for the marking period during which that unapproved absence occurs will be reduced by five (5) points. However, in applying this policy, a student's grade may not be reduced lower than 50 in any marking period.

At the beginning of each of the four marking periods, automatic grade reductions will begin anew, although

the accumulation toward the twenty maximum for the full-year course is cumulative for the year.

Upon recommendation of the teacher, the principal reserves the right to adjust a grade when a student's outstanding performance for the latter portion of a marking period may not fully be acknowledged because of the grading restrictions of this policy.

POLICY: Tolland Public Schools

Grades and Course Credit

Grades earned in any course shall reflect student daily participation as well as the fulfillment of other academic requirements as may be established by the teacher.

. . . Students absent from school or from a course of study for 28 or more days in one year will receive no school credit for the course or courses which reach this maximum level. When courses are scheduled for ½ year, the student will receive no credit if he/she is absent for 14 days or more. For courses scheduled for ¼ year, the student will receive no credit if he/she is absent for 7 days or more.

Appeals of Disciplinary Action

Most policies or procedures acknowledge that penalties involving withholding of academic credit are serious enough to merit providing an opportunity for student/parent appeal.

PROCEDURES: Tolland Public Schools

Appeal procedure—Students who have lost credit because of this policy may request an appeal hearing, or the parent/guardian may request such a hearing. Such requests should be made to the principal within five (5) days of the date of the letter notifying of loss of credit. The initiative of the appeals process is the sole responsibility of the parent or student.

A standing appeals committee consisting of one teacher, one administrator and either a guidance counselor or psychologist will be selected at each building level to serve on the committee each year. Other staff members [will be] invited to attend appeal hearings when appropriate.

If a majority of the committee feels that credit should be restored, credit will be restored. If the parent and/or student wish to appeal the decision, he/she may do so to the Superintendent. This appeal is to be made within five (5) days. If the parent and/or student does not agree with the Superintendent's decision, he/she may appeal to the Board of Education within five (5) days.

Homework Policy

During the twentieth century, emphasis on homework in the American public schools has waxed and waned. Although the reasons are unclear, during the century's first ten years, again in the 1930s and most recently in the 1970s, homework was not particularly stressed. It seems likely that the current renewed interest in homework stems from concern over recent declines in student achievement. Educators and laypeople alike share the belief that increased emphasis on homework will contribute to better student achievement. In fact, however, there have been few studies on the relationship between homework and student achievement and the studies which have been undertaken have yielded conflicting conclusions. But even if definitive support for homework cannot be found in research, the strong sense that homework is a valuable component in the educational experience of most students means that efforts to increase homework will be mounted.

Homework not only provides students with the opportunity to learn more facts and substance, it also encourages, and is a means of measuring, self-discipline and conscientious work habits. Homework also provides another opportunity for involving parents, especially parents of elementary school children, in the education of their children.

Review of homework policies and procedures in Connecticut schools indicates that one or more of the following elements, or topics, are included:

- a statement of philosophy—why homework is important, the purpose of homework
- suggested time limits for different grade levels
- responsibilities of teachers, students and parents

Each of these elements is discussed briefly and examples of their treatment in existing policies or procedures are provided.

Philosophy

Although homework is a traditional feature of American education, a board policy, especially a new policy or one which places increased emphasis on homework, should explain why the board believes homework is important and how it benefits students.

POLICY: Weston Public Schools

Homework is an integral part of the instructional program and learning process which allows students to follow through on their personal commitment to academic work. It should be meaningful and help students develop constructive attitudes and sharpen useful skills. The regular practice of homework requires self-discipline and enables students to function as individuals. Students who benefit the most from formal education are those who approach it with curiosity, varied interests, and a willingness to work hard.

Homework is fundamental to the individual's learning and development, yet it is recognized that some time be allotted for physcial and social recreation. It is expected that each student will put forth his best effort to extend, increase, and monitor this process.

It should be understood that each grade level serves as the foundation for the next. Homework should be introduced in the elementary school years to encourage responsibility, as well as good habits and study skills. All homework activities should contribute to the student's performance evaluation. We recognize that activities may need to accommodate students with different learning and organizational difficulties, or those with other special needs.

POLICY: Coventry Public Schools

. . . The Board recognizes that a reasonable amount of study and preparation is necessary for the scholastic growth of students. It is also aware that the amount of preparation should increase as the child progresses through the grades.

. . . Homework assignments should be given to reinforce and augment the lessons taught in class and provide exercises in the development of responsibility and of good work and study habits. These assignments allow for research, individual projects, and drill. They are intended to enhance the student's knowledge in the various subject areas. The assignment of homework shall be determined by the teachers in accordance with the individual needs of the students and Board policy.

Suggested Time Limits

Including specific suggested time limits for homework is a way of increasing the likelihood of policy implementation. Specificity also indicates board recognition of developmental differences among students at different grade levels. Such limits should, however, be clearly understood as guidelines for teachers who may use professional judgment in their application.

PROCEDURES: Regional School District #9
Easton–Redding

In order to provide continuity and growth as a student moves through the school system, the following time values should be regarded as general guidelines for the assignment of homework.

Grade	Time Value
K	15–20 minutes—once or twice a week
1	15–20 minutes—once or twice a week
2	15–20 minutes—once or twice a week
3	30–45 minutes—two or three times a week
4	30–45 minutes—two or three times a week
5	30–60 minutes—two or three times a week
6	60–75 minutes—daily
7	60–90 minutes—daily
8	75–120 minutes—daily
9–12	50 minutes per academic class period – 150 minutes daily average

POLICY (proposed): Enfield Public Schools

Time limits will vary from one grade to another and usually will not exceed the following:

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Minutes Daily	15	20	25	35	45	60	90	105	120	135	150	150

Responsibilities

Although suggested time limits are useful in implementing homework policy, effective homework assignments are equally, if not more, a matter of quality. The quality of homework depends on teachers, students and parents understanding, and playing their roles in making homework a meaningful exercise. It is helpful to spell out these responsibilities in administrative procedures.

PROCEDURES: Norwalk High School

Guidelines for students are:

1. to attend school and class regularly and punctually;
2. to be responsible for finding out and making up work missed when absent;
3. to understand the purpose and requirement of the assignment;
4. to understand the directions;
5. to understand the means of evaluation;
6. to understand that the content, structure and appearance of all written homework assignments are important elements in the grading process;
7. to understand the suggested time allotment;
8. to budget time realistically;
9. to assume responsibility for obtaining the proper resources and materials;
10. to establish a time for a regular pattern of review;
11. to demonstrate integrity and not to give or receive so much help that the value of the homework will be destroyed;
12. to meet deadlines and understand the penalties;
13. to understand that there is never a time when a student does not have homework. He may review, preview or improve his present assignment.

PROCEDURES: Wallingford Public Schools

The Teacher's Responsibility

1. Teachers will explain to students at the beginning of the school year and subsequently, if necessary, the homework policy and how it will be carried out in their respective classes.

2. If the homework is to have value, its purpose and relation to what has been learned in the classroom must clearly be understood by the student. Homework should supplement a well-planned lesson. Good teachers do not rely upon homework as a substitute for a well-planned classroom lesson in which the needed explanations and definitions for a task are fully communicated.

3. Students should understand not only what to do, but also how to do it.

4. Homework should grow from classroom problems, projects and concerns.

5. Homework assignments should be as individualized as possible realizing students accomplish tasks at varying rates of speed and in varied situations.

6. The student's total daily homework load, out-of-school responsibilities, and home conditions must be considered by the teacher when deciding upon the length of any assignment and in evaluating an assignment.

7. Every homework assignment should be properly evaluated and recorded within as short a time as possible after its completion. The results of evaluation should be reflected in the student's overall grade.

8. Teachers have the responsibility to communicate with parents of the children who are falling behind in completing homework assignments.

9. Assignments before holidays and vacations should be avoided. Consideration should be given students who may not have adequate time for homework preparation due to religious observance or illness. Homework should not prevent a family from fully participating in recreational activities.

REGULATIONS: Meriden Public Schools

What Teacher Can Expect From Parents Regarding Homework

1. Teachers can expect that parents will arrange a quiet, suitable place, with adequate work space, for the youngster to work.

2. Teachers can expect that the parents will cooperate by encouraging their youngster to complete homework assignments.

3. Teachers can also expect parents to understand the value of various types of homework, since the value differs under different circumstances and conditions.

Promotion and Retention Policies

The charge that increasing numbers of students are not mastering grade level basic skills is common in reports and studies critical of the American education system. This criticism has led to reexamination of promotion and retention policies in many school systems and by many state-level education agencies as well. Some critics maintain that relaxed promotion standards, and especially the practice of "social promotion," are to blame for falling student achievement. Reinforcing stricter standards through "merit promotion" could, they suggest, reverse the negative trend.

The history of American education has witnessed shifting support of social versus merit promotion. Merit promotion, in a pure form, was the rule in the nation's earliest common schools. Until the turn of the century merit promotion meant that promotion required meeting high standards and only the ablest students advanced very far through the educational system. High school graduation, for example, was achieved by only a small percentage of the population. During the course of the twentieth century some form of social promotion policies, which shifted emphasis to greater concern for social adjustment and continuous progress, gained ascendancy. The reasons for this phenomenon are complex, involving demographic, social, pedagogical and financial factors. It should also be noted that the movement toward social promotion included compromise positions such as "tracking."

Today few school systems operate with pure forms of either merit or social promotion and contemporary educational and social forces are such that some intermediate position will characterize new policies in this area. Current popular expectations about education will not allow a return to a merit system which demands that every student achieve the highest standards, but rather that all students achieve certain basic skills and mastery learning.

According to a recent *Harvard Educational Review* article by David F. Labaree of Georgetown University, "As the movement for more rigid promotional standards has gained momentum over the last two decades, it has tended to shift its energies from the attack on social promotion to the establishment of four related types of educational reform." These are:

Back to basics: reducing the number of electives and special programs and increasing the amount of instructional time devoted to traditional academic subjects.

Minimum competency testing: using standardized tests to determine whether or not a student meets the minimum requirements for promotion.

Retention: retaining students who fail to demonstrate minimum competency in basic skills.

Remediation: developing a new and intensified program of remediation to bring students who have been retained up to a promotable level.

It seems likely that further refinement of promotion and retention policies will occur in many school systems and will feature some or all of the reforms just described even though "research evidence on the subject is wholly inconclusive." Yet, despite the lack of solid research-based conclusions, Labaree suggests that "if a policy of raising promotional standards does indeed raise student achievement, it is likely to be for the following reasons."

Fear of retention: this negative motivation may prove effective, though many policies in fact try to counter the negative impact especially through remedial programs that downplay the punitive aspects of retention.

Enhanced remedial instruction: enhanced remediation, which can be costly, may bring the lowest achieving students to minimal competency levels.

Focusing attention on achievement: new policies may serve as "slogans . . . which serve as a rallying point for school people interested in emphasizing achievement by a variety of means. . . ."

Simulating achievement by the use of tests: if testing is used as the means of measuring achievement there may be a tendency to "teach to the test" at the expense of broader educational objectives.

But these are less than optimal conclusions about the effectiveness of promotion and retention standards. It seems likely that boards of education will continue to endeavor to raise student achievement by enacting more rigorous promotional policies and increasing the practice of retention. Labaree recommends that new or revised promotion and retention policies incorporate the following considerations:

A flexible promotion standard: at a minimum this means not relying on a single test score to determine promotion or retention; standards should include multiple measures including teacher evaluations.

A valid measure of achievement: the least valid measure is a nationally developed standardized test; the measures of a student's achievement should reflect the fact that "the process of learning for each student is located within a particular curriculum and a particular mode of instruction."

A rigorous evaluation of program effectiveness: temptations to justify the new policy by failing to undertake a valid measure of effectiveness should be avoided; if the program is not working, it should be modified.

More than just basics: although students who lack basic competency in reading and math should receive help in these areas, the entire curriculum should not be reduced to basics; the curriculum should be "expansive and challenging."

Include the average student: "If higher promotion standards are adopted, it should be as part of a much broader orientation toward high achievement for all students;" if the primary goal is to raise the achievement level of the lowest achievers, there is the danger of "debasing standards for the rest of the class."

Do not blame students for the failures of the schools: policies should also hold teachers, administrators accountable for giving students the tools they need to meet the achievement standards demanded.

Emphasize instruction over retention: intensified remedial help should accompany retention and it must be recognized that such instruction will add to school budgets.

Effective schools: recognition that "Ultimately, what matters most to student achievement is not one promotional policy or another but the overall effectiveness of the schools in carrying out their mission."

Review of current promotion and retention policies in Connecticut schools indicates that many of the elements Labaree recommends are included. The following elements characterize promotion and retention policies in the state's schools:

- a statement of philosophy underlying the policy
- criteria for promotion
- criteria for retention
- due process and appeals

Each of these elements is discussed briefly and examples of their treatment in existing policies and procedures are provided.

Philosophy

The philosophical basis for most promotion and retention policies acknowledge individual differences and the need to accommodate them. They also recognize the need to provide students with instruction that is suitable

to their academic, emotional, social and physical levels of development. Retention is seen, not as a punishment, but as a benefit to underachieving students who are afforded another opportunity to learn important skills.

POLICY: Danbury Public Schools

It is the philosophy of the Board of Education that all students should be placed in instructional programs in which they can achieve academically as well as emotionally, socially and physically. It is expected that the vast majority of students, given positive motivation and appropriate instruction, will progress satisfactorily through their elementary and secondary school programs. For a variety of reasons, however, individuals may require somewhat less or more time to develop their educational potential.

POLICY: Hartford Public Schools

Students in elementary schools are assigned to grades (kindergarten, grades 1–6) for organizational and record-keeping purposes. An important educational purpose served by the grade level structure is the framework it provides for parent and teacher expectancies of student performance. Accordingly, specific competencies in the curricula for reading, other language arts, and mathematics are organized by grade level performance.

Grade placement is not, however, the only basis for organizing classes. Combination classes, multi-grade clusters and other variations are among the options for grouping children for instruction. Because of the wide range of achievement and learning rate among children of similar age, continuous growth should be the educational goal for every student. Regardless of chronological age or grade placement, each child should be instructed at the highest level at which he/she is able to learn.

POLICY: Regional School District #9 Easton-Redding

In order for students to have the most effective educational experiences possible and in an effort to fulfill the educational goals and objectives of the school system for individual youngsters, it is essential that student evaluation be consistent and effectively lead to a determination of the appropriate level for each youngster throughout the Kindergarten through Eighth Grade Sequence.

Criteria for Promotion

No Connecticut district employs a single criterion as the basis for the decision to promote students. The range of, and flexibility inherent in, the criteria used by most districts is in keeping with a promotion and retention philosophy that recognizes the developmental differences of individual students.

POLICY: Newington Public Schools

The determination of a student's grade placement should be made following a careful evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of that placement. In each instance the following factors can be considered in relation to the group with which a student might be placed.

a. Chronological age
b. Mental ability as determined by tests and teacher's observation
c. Academic achievement in all subject areas, especially basic skill mastery, as determined by tests and the teacher's observation
d. Work and study habits
e. Physical development
f. Social maturity
g. Emotional maturity
h. Interests and degree of initiative shown in curricular and extracurricular activities
i. Attendance record
j. Availability of educational resources
k. Teaching situation in which the student might be placed; for example, class size and composition of group
l. Placement of siblings
m. Future educational objectives

POLICY: Bridgeport Public Schools

Note: *The Bridgeport Public Schools system has developed very complete and detailed minimum promotion standards. For each grade level, the concepts and skills each student must master in order to qualify for promotion are enumerated. The example provided here, the foreword of the document which describes standards for grades K–3, indicates that even precise guidelines are not to be applied dogmatically, without regard for individual student differences.*

The following report was designed to assist teachers in helping students meet the academic requirements for promotion and to unify promotional standards throughout the district. Current promotional practices and procedures have been examined and evaluated and when appropriate, incorporated into this study.

In order to eliminate possible misunderstandings or misrepresentations, certain points, all of which appear in the following pages, are restated here for emphasis and clarification:

1. The following pages contain a statement of *standards for promotion*. It does not supersede our present curriculum, nor is it a revision of the present one.

2. This is a statement of minimum requirements for promotion. In very few cases would the completion of minimum requirements be considered satisfactory accomplishment. The teacher should feel responsible for holding each child to the best of which he is capable.

3. The standards as stated herein are set up for the child in regular education only. Those who fall below or above the generally accepted range of expected achievement will receive special consideration in terms of their needs. Individual physical or emotional problems will receive treatment.

4. Reading includes oral and silent reading, neither of which type should be neglected in any unit of elementary school.

Criteria for Retention

Because the decision to retain can have such a profound influence on a student, most policies and procedures include criteria aimed at insuring that the decision to retain is truly in the best interest of the student. As with promotion criteria, a single criterion never forms the basis for the determination. Most policies or procedures also specify the need for communication with parents.

POLICY: Norwich Public Schools

Some considerations to be given for retention are as follows:

1. Retention will offer a reasonable chance of benefiting the child.
2. Retention will be considered when a pupil is achieving below his ability and grade level.
3. Retention will be considered when poor attendance has been a contributing factor to poor educational progress.

The recommendation for retention of a pupil will be based on the professional judgment of the classroom teacher(s) after having discussed this recommendation with all concerned—parents, administrators, and supportive personnel. Consideration to academic achievement, chronological age, and social maturity will be made in formulating the recommendation. The advantages to the student in question will be considered as well.

PROCEDURE: Stamford Public Schools

Nonpromotion

Nonpromotions in elementary and junior high school are determined by the combined judgment of the school principal and teachers. In such cases the parent will be contacted well in advance, although the final decision will rest with school authorities.

PROCEDURE: Lisbon Public Schools

Retention Guidelines

These guidelines indicate the various factors which should be considered before a decision can be made, and are not to be interpreted as the sole factor in determining whether a child is assigned to the next grade.

1. Before retention can be considered, it is essential that all avenues to encourage student growth be exhausted, and that the parents be kept informed of the student's achievement at all levels of development. In the event that retention may seem to benefit a student the Parent/Guardian should be informed during the third marking period and a record of Parent interaction should be documented. (Parent-teacher conferences shall be used.)

2. When a child is being considered for retention, then special conferences will be arranged by the teacher with the parents to discuss the student's progress, attitude, ability, and the advantages and disadvantages of retaining the student.

3. The student's teacher/teachers shall closely examine the student's performance, study habits, testing results, and other pertinent information. (The key is

Programs for Retained Students

Policies and procedures which call for special programs for retained students underscore the concept that retention is not a punishment. Commitment to such programs also indicate recognition that many students who fail to achieve grade-level competency necessary for promotion have special instructional needs.

establishing as much data as possible before making a final decision. The teacher should also discuss the matter of retention with other members of the staff who are involved with the student.)

4. A record of meetings involving the student's parents and phone calls shall be placed in the file containing student records. If the professional staff recommends retention, and the parent refuses, this shall also be noted.

5. Any student deemed far below the maturity level by his/her teacher and/or parents/guardian may be considered.

6. Any student who would clearly benefit by retention in the opinion of the child's teacher and/or parent/guardian may be considered.

7. The emotional, social, psychological well-being of the child shall also be considered.

8. The principal shall be informed immediately of all students being considered for retention.

9. A final decision concerning pupil retention will be made jointly by the professional staff and Parent/Guardian with the best interests of the child serving as the primary criteria in the decision-making process.

PROCEDURES: New Britain Public Schools

A planned remedial program shall be designed for each student retained. A Remedial Program Form shall be completed by the principal and submitted to the Director of Instruction by August 1. A copy of the Remedial Program will be given to the student's parent or guardian.

Students who are in the initial screening pool and who have already repeated a grade must be evaluated by the Child Study Team process. A planned program shall be developed for the student.

POLICY: Hartford Public Schools

Program for students who are retained.

The purpose of retention is not served when the student who is retained is provided with instruction in skills areas which have been mastered. The concept of continuous growth in skill development is a major philosophical principle of the Hartford Public Schools which guides instruction for all students, the student who is retained as well as the student who progresses normally through the grades. Therefore, for the student who has been retained, instruction in September will be initiated at that point in the sequence of skills development to which he/she has progressed.

Due Process and Appeals

Due process procedures concerning retention of students begin with communicating with students and parents before the decision to retain a student is made. Many school systems also recognize, in policies and procedures, the right of parents and students to appeal a decision to retain a student.

POLICY: Norwalk Board of Education

The final decision as to retention resides with the principal after consultation with staff. This is not to be interpreted to curtail the rights of the student to appeal to the Board of Education.

POLICY: New Milford Public Schools

If the parents do not agree with the principal's decision for promotion or retention, they will indicate their disapproval in writing. If the principal does not agree with the parents' position, the matter will be referred to the superintendent of schools. If the position of the superintendent is objected to by the student's parents, they have the right to bring the matter to the Board of Education.

APPENDIX

Committee to review policies on attendance, homework, promotion/retention

Bridgeport	Alexander Norwood, Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education
Fairfield	Edward H. Bourque, Assistant Superintendent of Instruction
Farmington	Beatrice C. Stockwell, Farmington School Board Member
Glastonbury	Lawrence Tiven, Assistant Superintendent
Monroe	Peter Barile, Jr., Superintendent
Orange	Dorothy L. Berger, Superintendent
Oxford	Angelo E. Dirienzo, Superintendent
Regional District #5 Bethany, Orange, Woodbridge	Joseph Proffit, Director of Instructional Services
Regional District #16 Beacon Falls, Prospect	John H. Proctor, Superintendent
Connecticut Association of Boards of Education	Linda Voghel, Director of Management Information

Teachers:

Fairfield	Terry Kinsella, Connecticut Education Association

(continued on page 34)

Teachers, continued

Hartford	Jean McDermott, Connecticut State Federation of Teachers
Killingly	Wendell Davis, Sr., Connecticut Education Association
Plymouth	Joyce Krinitsky, Connecticut State Federation of Teachers
Waterbury	Norma Napomicemo, Connecticut Education Association

Mary Ellen Stanwick, freelance writer and editor, is the principal author of this document.

Cattanach, David "Policy and Administrative Procedure: Balancing the Relationship." Paper delivered at CASA/CABE conference, December 4, 1984.

Kearns, Dorothy K. "Sidestep Policy Development Pitfalls," *American School Board Journal* vol. 169, February 1982.

Labaree, David F. "Setting the Standard: Alternative Policies for Student Promotion." *Harvard Educational Review*. Vol. 54 No. 1 February 1984.

Pingpank, Jeffrey C., Esq. "Grade Reduction Policies." *CABE Journal* Connecticut Association of Boards of Education. September 1984.

National School Boards Association. "Policies: The School Board Member's Guide to Policy Development." Alexandria, (undated).

New Jersey School Boards Association. "Fundamentals of School Board Membership." Trenton (undated).

Pennsylvania Department of Education. *Turning the Tide: Attendance Policies and Guidelines*. Harrisburg, 1984.

———. *Turning the Tide: Homework Policies and Guidelines*. Harrisburg, 1984.

Connecticut State Department of Education

Division of Elementary and Secondary Education
Robert I. Margolin, Associate Commissioner
and Division Director

Francis A. McElaney, Assistant Division Director

Bureau of School and Program Development

William J. Gauthier, Jr., Chief

Marie Della Bella, Consultant
Deborah Stewart, Consultant

Velma A. Adams, Editor

QUI
TRANSTULIT
SUSTINET